

## **Chapter 1**

# Vision and Principles





# 21st-Century Birmingham: A Vision for the City

This is the City of Birmingham's first full comprehensive plan since 1961, a half-century ago. Developed during 2011–2012, this plan is a blueprint for Birmingham to become a successful 21st-century city—a city that honors its past, faces and overcomes the challenges of the present, and builds on its assets to create a future filled with opportunity.

As this new comprehensive plan is being written in 2012, the city is preparing to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of Birmingham's renowned role as a critical turning point in the struggle for civil rights and the end of racial segregation in America. The 1961 comprehensive plan was overtaken by events and few of the plan's recommendations were implemented. Since then the city has experienced population decline, a profound economic transition from a predominantly manufacturing economy to a service economy, and—in recent years—an ongoing downtown revival bringing people to live in the city center. Birmingham has a rising national profile as a center of medical research and technology; it has built important new parks and sports venues; and it continues to be the region's center of arts and culture. While the City's 2004 downtown plan has served as a guide to downtown revitalization efforts, this new comprehensive plan is designed to encompass the entire city.

The purpose of a plan is to get to action. This plan includes a common vision; a set of strategies to capitalize on opportunities that exist right now, as well as opportunities that will emerge in the future; and an implementation plan for positive change with concrete steps that citizens, businesses, the nonprofit sector, and government can take to advance the strategies towards the goals.

Just having a plan can help make it a reality. A good plan supported by a community consensus and a government committed to implementation attracts partnerships, funding and private investment:

- **A plan shows that the city and community know what they want.** Funders and investors like to know what to expect and what is expected of them, because it means that their investments can go to work more quickly.
- **A plan shows that the city and community are willing to invest some of their own efforts and resources to achieve their goals.** For example, when a community makes public improvements or works hard to improve its effectiveness, it demonstrates its seriousness about making the plan a reality.
- **A plan shows that the city and community know what to do with new resources.** Federal funds increasingly come with requirements for coordinated planning. Without a plan, funds can go unspent, even though needs are evident in the community. A citywide plan provides a framework of policies and strategies for using resources to accomplish goals.

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## AN AMBITIOUS VISION

Developing a vision statement is an essential early step in creating a city comprehensive plan. Vision statements focus attention on a community's values, sense of identity, and aspirations. The vision statement tells a story and paints a picture of an ideal future. In creating their vision for the future Birmingham residents and stakeholders decided what they wanted to preserve and what they wanted to change. They articulated their desires and hopes, developed a consensus on an ideal future, and committed themselves to working toward that ideal. The City of Birmingham vision represents the guiding image for the community as it faces new challenges and complex choices. Accompanying the vision statement is a set of principles based on precepts that are important to Birmingham residents. The principles serve as a set of values that guide the master plan itself and its implementation. Together, the Vision and Principles are like the constitution of the comprehensive plan, setting the course for the future.

The Birmingham Comprehensive Plan Vision and Principles emerged from an extensive public outreach program and series of community participation events. They distill many hours of community activity and the contributions of over a thousand Birmingham residents and stakeholders who participated in a citywide visioning forum, “communities of place” meetings in six locations throughout the city, “communities of interest” meetings on specific topics, and who commented online. After this community

process, the draft Vision and Principles then went to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, which reviewed the detailed results of activities and community comment. After revisions by the Steering Committee, the draft Vision and Principles were endorsed by the City of Birmingham Planning Commission on March 6, 2012 and by the City Council on May 22, 2012. The Vision and Principles are the guiding framework for the elements of the City of Birmingham Comprehensive Plan.

## Birmingham’s Vision for the 21st Century

In 2032, the City of Birmingham leads the South as a community of choice and opportunity: diverse, prosperous, sustainable, and beautiful.

- > **People choose the City of Birmingham as a place to live.** Our neighborhoods are attractive, walkable, well maintained, and safe. The blighted properties of the past have been transformed into new or renovated housing, greenways and green open spaces, or other community assets. Across the city, there are appealing housing choices for all kinds of households: young singles and couples, families with children, empty nesters, and retirees.
- > **Birmingham has a connected network of walkable urban places.** Our compact, mixed use, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood centers support an enhanced and efficient transit system, and a network of safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle routes links neighborhoods with city destinations.
- > **Birmingham is innovative and prosperous, with a diversified and sustainable economy.** Education, innovation and investment have grown the economy and reduced poverty by creating new economic opportunities. As a community of learning, Birmingham offers excellent educational options for all age levels and interests, creating well-educated citizens and a modern workforce qualified for 21st century jobs. Vacant or

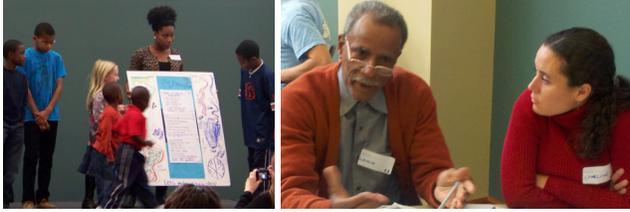
underutilized industrial sites are finding new uses that benefit the city and its economy. Because our culture of opportunity supports innovation and creativity, our diversified economy supports entrepreneurial start-ups and creates new jobs, ranging from businesses that emerge from the interdisciplinary research of UAB to our acclaimed food culture and arts scene.

- > **Birmingham is the most sustainable, “greenest” city in the South.** The city has become cleaner, healthier, more energy- and resource-efficient, and more attractive as a place to live. We have worked within the city and through regional partnerships to improve air quality, preserve sensitive lands, and protect and enjoy our excellent water resources. Our parks and greenways provide convenient, safe environments for all residents to play and exercise. Everyone has access to our city’s premier health services, healthy food choices, and healthy lifestyles.
- > **Birmingham’s success is built on local and regional partnerships.** We created strong partnerships encompassing citizens, the business community, institutions, nonprofits, and governments to transform Birmingham into the best place to live, work, study, and play in the South.



## PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### People



- Celebrate Birmingham’s diversity and welcome newcomers to live in the city.
- Connect people across barriers of neighborhood, race and class to work together for a better Birmingham.
- Celebrate our civil rights, cultural, and industrial history as a positive source of distinctive identity and contribution to the state and the nation.
- Make Birmingham a center of education excellence at all levels, including workforce training and adult education.
- Support holistic programs of social supports, community policing, and physical design to make every neighborhood safe.

### Prosperity

- Establish a climate friendly to investment and entrepreneurs to create jobs and grow local businesses, building on the strength of our medical, educational, and other growing economic sectors.



- Ensure that Birmingham residents have the skills to compete for the full range of jobs in the city.
- Build on our cultural institutions and artistic community and on our entertainment and sports attractions as a source of distinctive economic competitive advantage.
- Streamline regulations while preserving appropriate safeguards for our resources and quality of life.

### Place

- Create walkable neighborhoods of choice, including mixed-income opportunities and mixed-use commercial areas that support enhanced transit.
- Continue the transformation of downtown into a vibrant urban center of employment, housing, culture, and entertainment.
- Maintain and build on our park system by expanding greenways, bicycle and pedestrian routes to link neighborhoods and city destinations.

- Celebrate our history and heritage by preserving distinctive historic buildings and sites by giving them new uses.
- Make Birmingham a model clean, green, and healthy community by improving environmental health, promoting energy and resource-efficiency, and providing access to health care, exercise and nutritious food.



- Ensure high-quality development by making public investments a model of excellent design and function and through quality design standards for private development.

## Partnerships

- Partner among citizens, government, business, institutions and nonprofits to achieve comprehensive plan goals and reach out to the region, other Alabama cities, and other regions to grow and sustain our community and economy.
- Promote communication and transparency to keep residents, businesses and others informed about community conditions, decisions and options.
- Reinvigorate civic engagement in neighborhood associations and other groups to ensure that all voices are heard, with an emphasis on engaging young people.



## Performance

- Officially adopt the Comprehensive Plan as the framework for the city's future.
- Incorporate the plan in city policies and decision-making at all levels, including capital planning.

- Establish regular reporting on implementation progress, including an annual public hearing, and publicize implementation activities.
- Strengthen coordination with city and regional partners to achieve comprehensive plan goals.

## PERSONAL VISIONS

During the citywide Visioning Forum held in October 2011, participants were asked to share their personal visions for the future of the City of Birmingham.

### PERSONAL VISION STATEMENTS

Forum participants wrote personal vision statements to describe what they would hope to see in Birmingham twenty years from now.

**A vibrant, 24-hour, visually attractive, inclusive, culturally rich, southern (people, culture) city—with a world-class education system, safe streets, a positive identity with positive perception... Basically, a progressive example of urban southern culture—complete with good food, music, and hospitality... A leader in sustainable development and an example of true civic communication and participation for the state of Alabama... A leader in medical research and technology nationally... An accessible city connected by green spaces, bike trails and mass transit... A city where children receive the best possible education**

**and all families live in good affordable and adequate housing... A city that finally achieves its promise by fully embracing its motto "the people are the city" ... A city where employment opportunities are plenteous... A reliable and effective transit system... The revitalization of existing historic neighborhood housing and commercial districts... A city where all schools, regardless of area demographics, have what they need to provide a quality education... Communities that are safe, with mixed incomes, functioning neighborhood associations, safe community sports complexes...**